



FACT SHEET Harvey Milk Day (AB 2567)

Questions: email@eqca.org

This bill would require the Governor to annually proclaim May 22 as Harvey Milk Day, and would encourage public schools and educational institutions to conduct suitable commemorative exercises on that date.

Status: Introduced February 22, 2008

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Co-Authors: Senators Kehoe, Kuehl and Migden; Assemblymember Laird and Speaker Núñez

Sponsor: Equality California

BACKGROUND: WHO WAS HARVEY MILK?

Perhaps more than any other modern figure, Harvey Milk's life and political career embody the rise of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) civil rights movement. Milk was born on May 22, 1930. He was the first openly gay person to be elected to public office in a major city, serving on the San Francisco Board of Supervisors from 1977-1978.

While in office, Milk worked to pass a gay rights ordinance and defeat Proposition 6, commonly known as the Briggs Initiative, which would have banned gays and lesbians from teaching in public schools. Milk encouraged LGBT people to be visible in society and believed coming out was the only way they could achieve true social equality.

Milk was tragically assassinated in 1978 by Dan White, a former colleague on the Board of Supervisors whose politics often clashed with Milk's. After resigning from the Board and being denied reappointment by then Mayor George Moscone, White entered San Francisco City Hall through a window armed with a gun and shot and killed both Moscone and Milk.

During White's criminal trial, the defense argued that White was a victim of pressure and had been depressed, a state exacerbated by his consuming a large quantity of junk food before the murders. This later became known as the "Twinkie Defense." When this tactic proved successful and White was convicted of voluntary manslaughter and a mere seven years and eight months in prison, San Francisco's gay community erupted into protest in what came to be known as the "White Night Riots."

Harvey Milk's legacy as a civil rights leader is still felt today. He was named one of TIME Magazine's most influential people of the 20th century. Many institutions and organizations are named for Harvey Milk to commemorate his life and social contributions.

EXISTING LAW

Existing law requires the Governor to proclaim certain days each year, often in remembrance of important figures in the civil rights movement. These days include Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, Cesar Chavez Day, Native American Day, and Juneteenth National Freedom Day, among others. Some of these days, such as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day and Cesar Chavez Day, are also state holidays during which public functions are suspended and state employees receive a day off.

Existing law also prescribes public school holidays and commemorative activities on such days. For example, students receive a day off for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day and education about the role of Dr. King in the United States civil rights movement. March 31, Cesar Chavez Day, and the fourth Friday in September, Native American Day, are optional holidays for schools and may include commemorative exercises and lessons related to these holidays.

Other days simply act as days of “special significance,” which schools are encouraged to observe with suitable commemorative exercises.

WHAT THIS BILL WOULD DO

AB 2567 would require the Governor to proclaim May 22 of each year as Harvey Milk Day. It would also designate Harvey Milk Day as a day of special significance in public schools and educational institutions, and encourage those entities to conduct suitable commemorative exercises.

This bill would put California on record as recognizing the social contributions that Harvey Milk made to our nation as a civil rights leader. It would also allow schools to conduct activities that would foster respect for all, and educate students about an important figure who is often omitted from history lessons.

FISCAL IMPACT

This legislation would not require that state workers or school employees get the day off from work. Therefore, AB 2567 would have no fiscal impact to the state.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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